DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 283 193 CS 210 627

AUTHOR McEachern, William Ross
TITLE Group Compositions: A Model for Report Writing.
PUB DATE Nov 86
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English (76th, San Antonio, TX, November 21-26, 1986). Students' writing samples in figures 1 and 2 may not reproduce well.
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Cooperation; Intermediate Grades; Prewriting; Research Papers (Students); *Revision (Written Composition); *Teaching Methods; Writing (Composition); Writing Improvement; *Writing Instruction; *Writing Processes
IDENTIFIERS Collaborative Learning; *Collaborative Writing

ABSTRACT

Elementary school students are unfamiliar with the process of writing a report on an assigned topic. One strategy for rectifying this is to have students compose reports in groups. Group compositions are a collaborative effort to prepare a piece of writing whereby students in either large or small groups work through the writing process together and produce a single product. The teacher might choose the topic and direct the prewriting stage in order to help students through the first draft. While the instructor takes notes on the blackboard, students discuss the topic. Students then dictate sentences to the teacher, who copies exactly what has been dictated on a piece of chart paper so that the students can see the structure of their report taking shape. This first draft is open to change and improvement. Revision is especially difficult for students, and the group situation helps them through the process, since the burden of making improvements is not an individual one. The teacher may have to provide direct guidance at this stage. It is best if students concentrate on only one or two areas of concern at a time to avoid confusion. Proofreading is the final stage of the process. The real gauge of the success of group report writing is the first individual writing assignment during which the teacher may observe students employing revision, and note improved quality in their compositions. (Students' writing samples are included.) (AEW)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED283193

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Group Compositions:

A Model for Report Writing

William Ross McEachern

Department of Curriculum and Instruction
The University of Calgary
Calgary, Alberta
T2N 1N4

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

W. R. McEachern

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CS 210627

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Group Compositions: A Model for Report Writing

The "process-oriented" approach to the teaching of writing is gradually becoming more widely used in classrooms. Teachers and students are becoming comfortable with and conversant about the stages involved in bringing about a polished piece of writing. In addition, the powerful role of writing in the development of thinking and the importance of communicating our perceptions of our experiences with others are giving added impetus to the improvement of writing in the schools.

Nevertheless, students continue to be unsure of how to write reports in content area subjects without resorting to copying from encyclopediae and other reference materials. The writing improvement taking place in English classes is not always being transferred to the subject area classes. All too often, students are unfamiliar with the process of writing a report on a given topic. Group compositions are one means by which a model of the process of report writing may be presented.

Group compositions are a group effort to prepare a piece of writing whereby students in either large or small groups go through the steps of the writing process together and produce a common product. The pre-writing stage may be directed by the teacher in order to set the stage for the first draft which follows. The topic may be determined by the teacher after which a discussion should take place. The role of the teacher is to guide the discussion so that an organized overview of the topics to be written about may be prepared. As the students are discussing the topics which will make up the body of the writing, the teacher should be making notes on the blackboard so that the students will be cognizant of the overall structure of the passage to be prepared. The next stage for the

preparation of group compositions is for the teacher to model the actual preparation of the first draft. Following the overview of the topics on the blackboard, the students will dictate sentences to the teacher who will write exactly what is dictated on a piece of chart paper for everyone to see. It should be made apparent to the students that this first draft is open to change and improvement.

At some later date, the revision stage should take place, again in a group situation so that students will be able to observe the modelling of this stage (probably the most difficult one for the students to be able to carry out with any effectiveness). By participating in a group composition, the students should be more aware of the types of suggestions to make to their fellow writers when attempting to assist in revision. The teacher may have to give some direct guidance or instruction to the students if they are to understand well their role in this process. The focus should be on the communication of meaning to the audience. One emphasis should be on the strengths of the piece of writing in order to demonstrate to the students just how one goes about determining what are the positive aspects of the effort which ought to be commended. In addition, though, one or more specific strategies should be conveyed to the students in order to strengthen the piece of work. At this stage, the emphasis should not be on the location of grammatical problems in the passage. These problems may be eliminated at this stage, however, if the thinking behind them is cleared up. It is my opinion that the teacher should encourage the students to concentrate on one or two areas of concern at a time in order to avoid confusing the students at this stage.

Proofreading, another of the editing stages, may be used by the teacher to strengthen many aspects of the conventions of the written

language (but not all at once!). It should be made clear to the students that these conventions make sense and can be used by the writer to make the communication between writer and reader clearer. Using a group composition for review or reinforcement of a grammatical convention can be very illustrative to the students and make the point much clearer since the example comes from the writing of the group. Moreover, the teaching is much more meaningful since the students as a group are able to improve the clarity of communication.

The evidence of the success of the group composition in improving report writing comes when the teacher assigns individual reports to be prepared by the students on a variety of subjects related to a particular content area. The teacher will be observing the students doing the individual writing and afterwards going through the editing process in order to strengthen the report. The final proof, of course, will be in the quality of the finished individual products. Do the students express themselves clearly to the audience? Is the report obviously written in their own words and not those of another reference? Is the quality better than it had been previously? If the teacher can answer these questions affirmatively, then it would appear that the group composition was successful in modelling report writing.

An example of one group composition used to model the writing process should clarify how the process operates. This example comes from a grade six class who had used group compositions before. This particular example demonstrates how the group compositions as described for general use as a model of the writing process can be adapted for modelling report writing. This example is part of a language arts unit on the theme "How we live is influenced by the environment" (Thorn and Irwin, p. 130) which deals with

such issues as conservation and preservation of the natural environment. It was decided by the teacher and author, in this case, to modify somewhat the traditional approach to group compositions as described in that the class would be broken into three groups each taking one aspect of the topic on which to write a group composition. The topic of littering was decided upon by the teacher and author since it was an issue being discussed in the local newspapers and about which there had been a recent community problem. In discussion with the class, it was decided that the overall topic could be divided into three categories: Causes, Effects and Solution. This skill of being able to divide a broad topic into parts is one which is very necessary for individual report writing, and so was deemed to be very appropriate in this group composition if it, indeed, was to model the process of writing a report. Within each group, a scribe was appointed by the group to write the composition in the exact words which the speaker dictated. Each group tended to choose a leader as the scribe, but, on the other hand, most of the errors in spelling, for example, are those of the scribe and not necessarily those of individual group members. These same errors, however, were not corrected by the group members at the time at which they were written. The scribes wrote the compositions on large sheets of paper either taped to the wall, attached to an easel, or placed on the floor. Following are the compositions transcribed exactly as written by the scribes, with all spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors intact.

Figure 1 here

After this first draft has been completed by the three groups of students, the teacher can then have these drafts transcribed onto regular sized notepaper and copied for each student to work on, or the teacher can use the large poster sized paper and work right on that for the revision stage. With this grade six class, the first drafts were transcribed in order for each student to have a copy. Before beginning the revision of a group composition, the teacher needs to have some idea about one or two areas of concern either in reference to the writing style or the structure of the passage. This is not intended to limit the suggestions for improvement which the students offer, but rather to allow the teacher some input into areas which may not occur to the group but would nevertheless improve the quality of the piece of writing.

In order to attempt the revision of the first section of "Causes", I as teacher decided that if the students did not focus in on this area of concern, I would introduce the topic of paragraphing, something which the class had been working on previously. In the first draft of "Causes", the group had divided the passage into three paragraphs even though it would have neatly qualified as one paragraph with a beginning and concluding sentence. Before introducing this concern, though, as a teacher modelling the revision stage of writing, I asked the group to indicate areas of strength in the writing. It was of interest to note that the class made note of the fact that there was a variety of sentence types in the passage and that the vocabulary used was well chosen and for the most part precise. This skill of being able to offer positive and appreciative comments to the writers is a very important part of the writing process. At this point, suggestions for improvement of the writing were to be offered to the writers in a constructive manner. The class was reminded that spelling

errors were not to be emphasized at this time. Rather, suggestions for improvement of the message and its clarity were more important. The students immediately suggested that the references to 'people' should be reversed in the first sentence in that the pronoun was introduced before its antecedent and that this was confusing to the reader. In addition, one student suggested that 'solved' was a more precise word than 'over'. An interesting discussion followed on the appropriateness of the masculine pronoun 'his' in reference to a person's carelessness. We concluded by inserting the words 'or her' and the class seemed satisfied that this was a much more appropriate choice of words. No one, however, mentioned the fact that the passage was divided into three paragraphs with no apparent reason for doing so. At this point, I as teacher asked the class to review the characteristics of a paragraph. After doing so, the class was asked to assess the paragraphing in the selection. We looked at the topic sentence and concluded it was a very good one to use as an introduction; then we looked at the supportive sentences which followed; and finally we looked at the concluding sentence and decided that the requirements of a good paragraph were met. At that time, after much guidance from the teacher, the suggestion was made that this should indeed be one paragraph. During this revision stage, not only were vocabulary improvements made upon the students' suggestions, but also a lesson was taught on paragraphing set in the context of the writing of the students. Finally, spelling errors were identified and corrected. This concluded the revision stage of this section on "Causes of Littering."

In a similar manner, the revision stage of the other two sections of the report; namely, 'Effects of Littering' and 'Solution', were discussed

by the teacher and students and suggestions made as to the proposed improvements to the writing. The main area of concern once again in these sections was the improvement of paragraphs. Figure 2 shows the revisions suggested by the students. Although the teacher had to bring the paragraphing to the attention of the class during the revision of the first section, 'Causes', it is important to note that with the remaining two sections, the suggestions for improvement of the paragraphing came from the class members. It should not be necessary to discuss in detail the revisions for each of these two sections; but the reader is directed to the class work for study.

Figure 2 here

This example of a group composition should demonstrate that the modelling of report writing can result in a polished product. If students at this level were to individually write reports with this clarity and precision, teachers would be satisfied that the writing process is being applied successfully in content area writing. Group compositions are a successful modelling strategy to encourage this application.

Reference:

Thorn, E.A., & Irwin, J.M. (1981). Expressways-Level 12. Toronto: Gage.

LITTERING

Causes

There are many causes for littering in our environment. Laziness is one of the biggest problems because they are to lazy to drive into the dump If people wern't so lazy part of our littering problem would be over.

Not all littering problems are caused by people Some are caused by nature If the garbage is dumped in an unprotected place the wind may blow it on the roads and other areas. Some people are so careless they don't protect the garbage from falling out of vehicles. When a person litters in an unwanted place other lazy people may follow his carelessness, and do the same. All humans don't know of the problems they are causing when they litter.

Pollution is a big problem and we should do our best to prevent it.

Effects

There are many harmful effects because of the pollution we cause in our communities. One serious problem that's caused by pollution is the polluting of water. This is a serious problem because there are many animals who live in and around the water. The polluted water may kill the fish which may cause more pollution, when those fish die, the animals that eat the fish will leave and move on to another place. This also causes problems for people because people have to drink the impure water and eat the animals. This garbage pollution also causes problems because it attracts rats. These rats may effect the homes and the people by eating food and spreading diseases.

When we throw the garbage out this makes our communities unpleasant to look at. This also causes a lose of money to the Island because the bad appearance is a deafent turnoff to the tourists. You can see that pollution is a very big problem that must be controlled. 12

Solution

Garbage can be stopped. If we all work together, we can do it. Garbage that we clean up can be used or reused in many ways, such as old boards to use as firewood. The waisted food can be used for animals on farms.

Garbage committees can put up signs to encourage people to clean up there garbage, and tell them what they can do with their garbage, eg dig a hole and bury it. Garbage commitees also go around their communities and collect useful, and unwanted garbage, and than they take it to a recycling plant or a dump.

To prevent people from littering in our communities. We should have trash cans every few miles a part, and have a dump sight in every community. We can also help by not littering.

There are many more ways to prevent people from littering in our communities, so if you use these ways it will really help.

LITTERING

Causes

There are many causes for littering in our environment. Laziness is one of the biggest problems because ~~they~~ people are to too lazy to drive into the dump. If ~~people would~~ they weren't so lazy, part of our littering problem would be solved. Not all littering problems are caused by people. Some are caused by nature. If the garbage is dumped in an unprotected place the wind may blow it on the roads and other areas. Some people are so careless they don't protect the garbage from falling out of vehicles. When a person litters in an unwanted place, other lazy people may follow his or her carelessness and do the same. All humans don't know the problems they are causing when they litter.

Pollution is a big problem, and we should do our best to prevent it.

There are many harmful effects because of the pollution we cause in our communities. One serious effect is the polluting of water. This is a serious problem because there are many animals who live in and around the water. The polluted water may kill the fish which may cause more pollution. When those fish die, the animals that eat the fish will leave and move on to another place. This also causes problems for people because they have to drink the impure water and eat the animals. This garbage pollution also causes problems because it attracts rats. These rats may effect the homes and the people by eating food and spreading diseases.

When we throw the garbage out this makes our communities unpleasant to look at. This also causes a loss of money to the Island. Because the bad appearance is a definite turnoff to the tourists. You can see that pollution is a very big problem that must be controlled.

Solution

littering
~~Garbage~~ can be stopped. If we all work together, we can do it. Garbage that we clean up can be reused in many ways. For example, people can use old boards as firewood. The wasted food can be used for animals on farms.

Garbage committees can put up signs to encourage people to clean up their garbage and tell them what they can do with it. For example, people can dig a hole and bury it. Garbage committees also go around their communities and collect useful and unwanted garbage. Then they take it to a recycling plant or a dump.

To prevent people from littering in our communities, we should have trash cans every few miles a part, and have a dump sight in every community. We can also help by not littering.

There are many ways to prevent people from littering in our communities, so if you use these ways it will really help.